



CANIS DINGO, *Blumenb.*

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CANIS DINGO, *Blumenb.*

The Dingo.

HEAD, OF THE SIZE OF LIFE.

THE opposite life-sized head of the Dingo, or native Australian Dog, is portrayed so faithfully, through the talent of Messrs. Richter and Krefft, that I am certain no one will regret my giving two plates of this animal: whether the head be viewed as a zoological illustration or as a work of art, it must be equally acceptable.

The natural history of the Dingo is so fully entered into in the letter-press accompanying the reduced figures, both from my own observation of the animal in a state of nature and from the writings of previous authors, that to recapitulate them here would be superfluous; I therefore refer my readers to that account.

It will be seen that the animal is subject to much variety of colour; I might therefore have multiplied the plates to almost any extent; but such a measure would have been of very questionable utility: I have therefore confined myself to one representing the normal style of colouring.



CANIS DINGO, *Blanca*

CANIS DINGO, *Blumenb.*

The Dingo.

Canis Dingo, Blumenb.—Shaw, vol. i pl. 76.—Gray, List of Spec. of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 57.

— *familiaris*, var. *Australasiæ*, Desm.—Benn. Gard. and Menag. of Zool. Soc. del., vol. i. p. 51, with fig.

Chrysæus Australiae, Lieut.-Col. Hamilton Smith in Jard. Nat. Lib. *Dogs*, vol. i. p. 188. pl. 10.

“WHETHER the numberless breeds of dogs, which are the companions of the human race in every region of the globe, were originally descended from one common stock, and owe their infinite varieties solely to their complete domestication, the modifications by which they are distinguished having been gradually produced by the influence of circumstances,—whether, on the contrary, they are derived from the intermixture of different species, now so completely blended together as to render it impossible to trace out the line of their descent,—and whether on either supposition the primæval race or races still exist in a state of nature, are questions which have baffled the ingenuity of the most celebrated naturalists. Theory after theory has been advanced, and the problem is still as eagerly debated as ever, and with as little probability of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. In the investigation of this difficult subject, however, as in the search after the philosopher’s stone, many curious facts have been brought to light which would otherwise in all probability have remained buried in obscurity; and the causes which are continually operating to produce a gradual change of character, both in outward form and in intellectual capacity, among the brute creation, have received considerable elucidation. It is thus that theories, however erroneous in themselves, are frequently made subservient to the advancement of science, by the important facts which are incidentally developed by their authors in the ardour of their zeal for the establishment of a favourite hypothesis.”

Such are the words of the late Edward Turner Bennett at the commencement of his paper on the history of the Dingo in “The Gardens and Menagerie of the Zoological Society delineated.” Agreeing with Mr. Bennett in the impossibility of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion on the subject, I feel that I cannot close the present work without giving a figure and description of an animal which forms so prominent a feature in the fauna of Australia. It may be expected also that I should myself have formed some opinion as to its claim to be regarded as indigenous or otherwise; and if this opinion should be at variance with those of some Australian zoologists who have lately written on the subject, I may state that it has not been formed without due consideration. Without going into the probable origin of this particular race of dogs, or offering reasons why it should not be considered as indigenous, I may briefly state that I believe it has followed the black man in his wanderings from Northern Asia through the Indian Islands to Australia, the southern portion of which country appears to be its boundary in this direction; for I believe it has never been found in Van Diemen’s Land in the wild or semi-wild state in which it occurs on the Australian continent. From what I saw of the animal in a state of nature, I could not but regard it in the light of a variety to which the course of ages had given a wildness of air and disposition; indeed it appeared to have all the habits of a skulking low-bred dog, and none of the determined air and ferocity of disposition of the wolf or jackal: in confirmation of this opinion, I may cite the facility with which the natives bring it under subjection, and the parti-colouring of its hairy coat; for although the normal colouring is red or reddish sand-colour; black, or black and white, individuals are not unfrequently seen; and that this variation in the colouring is not due to crossing with the domesticated races introduced when the country was first discovered, is proved by the following passage in the Appendix to “Collins’s Voyage,” a work published soon after the colonization of New South Wales, where he says, “the dogs of this country are of the jackal species; they never bark, are of two colours, the one red, with some white about it, the other black: some of them were very handsome.” The existence of parti-coloured Dingos is still further confirmed by Mr. Gilbert’s note on the animal, as observed by him in Western Australia: “The Dingo is very common over all parts of this colony. There are a very great number of varieties, varying from reddish brown to black, white, light brown, and black and white.” Now, on the other hand, it may be affirmed that late geological discoveries will set aside the idea of its being a mere variety and tend to prove that this dog existed in Australia even prior to the aborigines; for it is said that a skeleton of a Dingo has been discovered at Warnamborl, beneath a bed of volcanic ash; but I believe no fossil remains have yet reached this country. The following letter on the subject has been kindly transmitted to me by Mr. Gerard Krefft, a gentleman to whom I am indebted for a beautiful drawing of the head, and an entire figure of the animal sketched either from life or immediately after it was killed:—

“In reply to your inquiry about the Australian Native Dog, I beg to state that it is proved without a doubt, as far as my own judgment goes, that the Dingo is an original inhabitant of the Australian continent.

“There is now, at the Museum in Melbourne, a fossil skull, found with other animal remains in a cave at

Mount Macedon, by Mr. Selwyn, the Geological Surveyor of Victoria. This skull, according to the authority of Professor M'Coy, is identical with that of the Dingo of the present day.

"An article to this effect was published by the learned Professor in the 'Argus' of 1857; but as it is not in my power to consult a file of this Journal, I am unable to furnish any further particulars.

"All the specimens of the Dingo procured by me during my stay at the Lower Murray were distinguished by a white tip at the extremity of the tail, and among the 'trophyies' which so generally ornament shepherds' huts in Australia, I do not recollect to have seen a single tail without the white tip.

"The black variety is more scarce; the single specimen which I secured was a young bitch, quite black, except the inside of the fore legs and paws and the outside of the hind legs and paws, which were of a tan-colour. The head was more pointed than in the yellow variety, and had a distinct patch of white, about the size of a shilling, on each cheek.

"I made a drawing of the animal on the spot, and another one of the head, life size; both sketches are now, I trust, in the hands of Professor M'Coy. This dog had been prowling about Jamieson's Station for several nights; it fell at last a victim to strychnine, and I secured its skin."

During my wanderings in Australia I saw much of the Dingo in a state of nature, and can bear testimony to its great tenacity of life and the consequent difficulty of destroying it. I also witnessed the destructive nature of its habits in various ways, particularly its mode of "rushing" the sheep-fold, when it not only wantonly kills great numbers, but scatters the remainder to such an extent as almost to occasion the loss of the entire flock. It is not altogether for the purpose of supplying the cravings of hunger that the Dingo visits the sheep-pen, but in mere wantonness, dealing out his vengeance right and left with a single bite, which, although not fatal at the moment, the sheep seldom recovers, but lingers and soon dies. Mr. Gilbert states that its more usual mode of attack is to follow a flock of sheep, and when a lamb drops behind to immediately pounce upon and carry it off; and Collins mentions that such is its invincible predilection for poultry, that not even the severest beatings can repress it.

"The Dingos, or native dogs, 'Warragal' of the Aborigines," says Dr. Bennett, "are the wolves of the colony, and are perhaps unequalled for cunning. These animals breed in the holes of rocks: a litter was found near Yas Plains, which the discoverer failed to destroy, thinking to return and catch the mother also, and thus exterminate the whole family; but the 'old lady' must have been watching him, for on his returning a short time after, he found all the little dingos had been carried away, and he was never able, although diligent search was made in the vicinity, to discover their place of removal. The cunning displayed by these animals, and the agony they can endure without evincing the usual effects of pain, would seem almost incredible, had it not been related by those on whose testimony every dependence can be placed. The following are a few among a number of extraordinary instances. One had been beaten so severely, that it was supposed all the bones were broken, and it was left for dead. Upon the person accidentally looking back, after having walked some distance, his surprise was much excited by seeing 'master dingo rise, shake himself, and march into the bush, evading all pursuit. One supposed to be dead was brought into a hut, for the purpose of undergoing 'decortication;' at the commencement of the skinning process upon the face, the only perceptible movement was a slight quivering of the lips, which was regarded at the time as merely muscular irritability: the man, after skinning a very small portion, left the hut to sharpen his knife, and returning, found the animal sitting up, with the flayed integument hanging over one side of the face. Another instance was that of a settler, who, returning from a sporting exhibition with six kangaroo dogs, met with a dingo which was attacked by the dogs and worried to such a degree, that finding matters becoming serious, and that the worst of the sport came to his share, the cunning dingo pretended to be dead; thinking he had departed the way of all dogs, they gave him a parting shake and left him. Unfortunately for the poor dingo, he was of an impatient disposition, and was consequently premature in his resurrection; for before the settler and his dogs had gone any distance, he was seen to rise and skulk away, but at a slow pace, on account of the rough treatment he had received; the dogs soon re-attacked him, when he was handled in a manner that must have effectually prevented any resuscitation taking place a second time. The Dingo, like all dogs in a state of nature, never barks, but simply whines, howls, and growls, the explosive noise being only found among the dogs which are domesticated."

I cannot conclude this paper without stating that the Dingo affords considerable exercise and amusement to the Nimrods of Australia, who hunt it precisely as the fox is hunted in England, and for which it forms no mean substitute.

The size of the Dingo is about that of the English Fox-hound, but it is much lower on the legs. The accompanying Plates represent the head of the natural size, and the whole animal reduced.